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PAPERS

From Slave to Educational Model: The Trajectory of the Greek Pedagogue

De Escravo a Modelo Educacional: A Trajetória do Pedagogo Grego

De Esclavo a Modelo Educativo: La Trayectoria del Pedagogo Griego

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Abstract

This article analyzes the servile condition of the ancient Greek pedagogue and discusses, based on the **Philogelus**, an anecdote book from the fourth or fifth century A.D., and Paladas of Alexandria, a poet of the IV century A.D., if there was indeed a transition in the social and economic status of the pedagogue that placed him, starting in the II century A.D., as a model for Greco-Roman education.

Keywords: Pedagogue; Philogelus; Paladas of Alexandria.

Resumo

Este artigo faz um retrospecto da condição servil do antigo pedagogo grego e discute, com base no **Filógelo**, um livro de anedotas do séc. IV ou V A.D., e em Paladas de Alexandria, um poeta do séc. IV A.D., se ocorreu, de fato, uma transição no estatuto social e econômico do pedagogo que o colocou, a partir do séc. II A.D., como modelo educacional da *paideia* greco-romana.

Palavras-chave: Pedagogo; Filógelo; Paladas de Alexandria.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la condición servil del antiguo pedagogo griego y discute, basado en el **Philogelus**, un libro de anécdotas del IV y V siglo A.D., y Paladas de Alejandría, el poeta del siglo IV A.D., si efectivamente se produjo una transición en la situación social y económica del pedagogo que lo colocó, a partir del siglo II A.D., como modelo educativo de la *paideia* grecorromana.

Palabras-clave: Pedagogo; Philogelus; Paladas de Alejandría.

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With their comedy plays and natural penchant for mockery, the ancient Greeks practically invented humor. Debauchery has the inconvenience of exaggerating the facts; on rare occasions, however, it offers a blatant lie. And perhaps it is in this seemingly implausible place that we find some solution for an intriguing mystery in the history of education. We do not know how and when the pedagogue - a slave who escorted the Greek children to school or to a teacher's home - became the educational model that the West was to follow. When he deals with the work **The pedagogue**, written by Clement of Alexandria in the second century A.D., Jaeger (1991, pp. 83-84) argues that, at this point in history, the transition was already complete. According to him,

> The very choice of the title **Paedagogus**, which shows Christ in a new role [...] as the "educator of humanity", is thereby contrasted with the Greek idea of culture as a whole, for this is the exact meaning the word *paideia* developed in the course of its history. The use of the word "pedagogue" in this exalted sense indicates that it no longer meant the slave who, in classical Greece, used to escort a young man to school and back, but comes closer to the philosophical meaning that Plato gave to the word *paidogogein* in the **Laws**, where he defines God's relationship with the world in this way: "God is a pedagogue for the whole world."

Jaeger went too far. Plato was not attributing to God the role of a pedagogue, nor did he see this function as a noble career to be followed by the educators of his day. It is sufficient to include here Plato's statement (**Laws** 897b) in its context so we can see that.

> ἄγει μὲν δὴ ψυχὴ πάντα τὰ κατ' οὐρανὸν καὶ γῆν καὶ θάλατταν ταῖς αὑτῆς κινήσεσιν, αἷς ὀνόματά ἐστιν βούλεσθαι, σκοπεῖσθαι, ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, βουλεύεσθαι, δοξάζειν ὀρθῶς ἐψευσμένως, χαίρουσαν λυπουμένην, θαρροῦσαν φοβουμένην, μισοῦσαν στέργουσαν, καὶ πάσαις ὅσαι τούτων συγγενεῖς ἢ πρωτουργοὶ κινήσεις τὰς δευτερουργοὺς αὖ παραλαμβάνουσαι κινήσεις σωμάτων ἄγουσι πάντα εἰς αὔξησιν καὶ φθίσιν καὶ διάκρισιν καὶ σύγκρισιν καὶ τούτοις ἑπομένας θερμότητας ψύξεις, βαρύτητας κουφότητας, σκληρὸν καὶ μαλακόν, λευκὸν καὶ μέλαν, αὐστηρὸν καὶ γλυκύ, καὶ πᾶσιν οἷς ψυχὴ χρωμένη, νοῦν μὲν προσλαβοῦσα ἀεὶ θεὸν ὀρθῶς θεοῖς, ὀρθὰ καὶ εὐδαίμονα παιδαγωγεῖ πάντα, ἀνοίᾳ δὲ συγγενομένη πάντα αὖ τἀναντία τούτοις ἀπεργάζεται.
>
> *the soul then leads all things in heaven, earth and sea by its movements, whose names are "to want", "to inquire", "to take care of", "to deliberate" and "to give a correct or false opinion". It does that when it exults and regrets, dares and fears, hates and loves, and all other actions related to these; or the primary movements, once again receiving the secondary movements of corporeal substances, lead all things towards growth and corruption, decay and construction, and towards their attending traits, such as hot and cold, heavy and light, hard and soft, white and black, bitter and sweet, and all other things that the soul uses, for when it accepts reason, itself always regarded as a goddess among gods, the soul rightly takes [paidagôgei] all things to right and happiness; when, however, it associates with foolishness, it performs the opposite of all this.*

That is, the evidence that Jaeger adduces to support the idea that the educator came from an illustrious lineage does not hold after all.

According to Quinn (2001), joke books originated in a long oral tradition. In fact, Athenaeus 614d-e mentions that Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, commissioned one such work from Athens and paid a lot of money for it. Besides, in the second century B.C., Plautus twice mentions the existence of these books, once in **Persa** 392 and another time in **Stichus** 400. It seems that such books provided a stock repertoire for the jokes that parasites used to tell in the banquets that they attended or in the barbershop, a traditional place for male gossip. The **Suidas**, a Greek encyclopedia from the Middle Ages, makes the following statement about one of these books: ἤγουν τὸ βιβλίον τὸ φερόμενον εἰς τὸν Κουρέα, "a book we often bring to the barbershop" (ADLER, 1928-1935).

Since the school was the subject of some Greek anecdotes of the early Christian period, what can these unpretentious gags reveal to us about the figure of the pedagogue? Do they suggest, as Jaeger claims, that the transition to a high status had already taken place? What peculiar aspects of school life do they reveal to be in place at the end of antiquity? I make special reference to the **Philogelus** (THIERFELDER, 1968), a Greek text from the fourth or fifth century, which the manuscripts generally attribute to Hierocles, a neo-Platonist philosopher, and Philadelphus, the sophist. The title, which can be translated as "addicted to jokes" or "lover of laughs", reveals the nature of its content: it is the oldest joke book to come from the Greco-Roman era. The volume, famous for a dearth of the so-called "dirty" jokes, includes a collection of 265 anecdotes about the most different themes and characters, approximately ten of which relate to schools and pedagogues. Jennings (2001), commenting on a new edition and translation of the **Philogelus** by Dawe (2000), suggests that the study of its anecdotes may increase our understanding of ancient stereotypes.

The anecdotes of the **Philogelus** are short and to the point. They seem to retain only the general content of an idea that the joker should adapt to his ways and objectives, making it more graphic and attractive. His main object of laughter is the *scholastikos*, a stock character immortalized by old Attic comedy (TORRES, 2014). He is, in general, a pedantic scholar. For Andreassi (2004, pp. 43-51), however, at that time the term had already lost its exact meaning and simply pointed out that the listener was facing an anecdote, just as children know today that they are facing a fairy tale when they hear the expression "once upon a time". For that reason, Crompton (2013) generally translates it as "an idiot". Among the ten anecdotes I selected for analysis here, only two include the pedagogue. The others speak of students and teachers or somehow make mention to one's school life.

Jokes about a student who dies

A especially interesting group of Philosopher jokes includes three anecdotes (77, 257, and 258) in which the student dies and therefore does not attend school. In **anecdote 77**, a father apologizes to the teacher for his dead son missing class:

> Σχολαστικὸς ἐκκομίσας τὸν υἱόν, ἀπαντήσας τῷ διδασκάλῳ αὐτοῦ· Σύγγνωθι, ἔφη, ὅτι οὐκ ἦλθεν ὁ υἱός μου εἰς τὴν σχολήν· ἀπέθανε γάρ.
>
> *An idiot was accompanying his son's coffin when he came across his teacher and said, "I'm sorry my son did not go to class: he passed away!"*

We should not argue about taste, but the content of the joke sounds perhaps too gruesome for our refined preference. It is basically an example of dark humor. The "idiot" (*scholastikos*) is not offering a pathetic excuse for his son's absence. The use of the verb *ekkomizô* reveals, in fact, a funeral procession and shows the truth of a father's remark. What makes it funny is his concern to justify, for the "teacher" (*didaskalos*), the absence of a deceased child. The word *scholê*, which I translated as "class", also means "school". Technically, it meant "leisure" or "free time". In the sense of school, it was an abbreviation of *scholastêrion*, that is, a "place for leisure". The presence of the word *scholê* in the anecdote points, firstly, to the intimate association between the "pedantic or idle man" (*scholastikos*) with the school environment. Secondly, it suggests that the school was not seen in antiquity as a place of boredom and dull intellectual exercises, but a space for pleasure. On that account, maybe we should ask ourselves, "have we changed or has the school?"

Despite its bad taste, **anecdote 257** shows a similar anxiety concerning children not attending school:

> Σχολαστικὸς υἱὸν θάψας καὶ συναντήσας τῷ διδασκάλῳ αὐτοῦ εἶπεν· Προ<ς>ῆλθεν ὁ παῖς; ὁ δέ φησιν· Οὔ. καὶ ὁ σχολαστικός· Λοιπὸν οὖν, καθηγητά, τέθνηκεν.
>
> *After burying his son, an idiot happened to come across his teacher and asked him, "Has the child come to class?" He answered, "No." To which the idiot said, "Well, boss, he has died!"*

Humor here certainly does not come only from the father's absurd question, but also from the fact that, even in the worst of times, the father still worried about what a teacher might think of his child's absence. In the anecdote, the father uses two distinct words to refer to the educator: the terms "teacher" (*didaskalos*) and "boss" (*kathêgêtês*), which are respectful enough to be used in the Gospels in reference to Christ (Matthew 8:19 and 23:10, for example).

Anecdote 258 is a bit longer and more elaborate:

> Σχολαστικὸς παιδοτρίβης ἀκούσας περὶ μαθητοῦ, ὅτι νοσεῖ, τῇ δὲ ἑξῆς, ὅτι πυρέττει, ὕστερον δὲ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀκούσας, ὅτι ἀπέθανεν, ἔφη· Οὕτω προφασιζόμενοι οὐκ ἐᾶτε τοὺς παῖδας μανθάνειν.
>
> *When an idiotic physical education teacher heard a parent speaking that a student was sick; soon after, that he had a fever; and, finally, that he had died, he said: "With so many excuses, you are not letting your children learn".*

This anecdote differs from the previous ones because, in this case, we are not entirely sure whether the excuses proceed. At least in the eyes of the "idiotic" teacher, the *paidotribês*, the ancient personal trainer who helped students (*mathêtai*) practice physical exercises in the Greek gyms, parents were used to lie shamelessly to protect their children. Despite this fact, the story suggests that, at least in this case, the father was telling the truth.

Anecdotes about a student's death show that the absence from school activities was considered so serious that it required justification from the parents. They also show that student attendance was a constant concern for parents and teachers alike.

Jokes about an untalented grammar teacher

The **Philogelus** contains a group of jokes that tease some grammar teachers for their lack of talent. Thus, **anedocte 140** takes us to this unpleasant situation in which an unskilled teacher tries to teach grammmar:

> Εὐτράπελος ἰδὼν γραμματοδιδάσκαλον ἀφυῆ διδάσκοντα προσελθὼν ἠρώτα, διὰ τί κιθαρίζειν οὐ διδάσκει; Τοῦ δὲ εἰπόντος· Ὅτι οὐκ ἐπίσταμαι – εἶπε· Πῶς οὖν γράμματα διδάσκεις οὐκ ἐπιστάμενος;
>
> *A prankster saw an untalented grammar teacher lecturing, then approached him and asked, "Why don't you teach the harp instead?" He replied, "Because I do not know how to play it!" "How come, then, you teach grammar without knowing it?"*

"A prankster saw" (*eutrapêlos idôn*) is a formula that initiates three anecdotes (140, 147, and 151) in the **Philogelus**. In anecdote 140, the "prankster" sees "an untalented grammar teacher" (*grammatodidaskalon aphyê*). This grammar teacher has no natural inclination for his job, and this is shown by the adjective *aphyês*, which has precisely that meaning, although Crompton (2013, p. 94) prefers to call him "teaching apprentice". Because of this negative way to see him, the "prankster" suggests that he should "teach the harp" (*kitharizein*), a practice in which his imposture would soon become evident. This reminds us of Xenophon's account in **Memorabilia** 1.7.1-2 (MARCHANT, 1921), in which he states that Socrates argued that someone who pretends to be a flute-player must imitate a genuine flute-player in every respect except one: they should never play it. If they did that, they would be unmasked. Even a simple "grammar teacher" knows it, and - for that reason - abstains from teaching the harp, the flute, or any other musical instrument. Despite the fact that many people think that anyone can become a school teacher, the "prankster" does not: "how come, then, you teach grammar without knowing it?" This question sounds so current, doesn't it? According to **anecdote 196**, a teacher may not have any talent, but still show some wit:

> Ἀφυὴς γραμματικὸς ἐρωτηθείς· Πῶς δεῖ λέγειν, τοῖς δύο ἢ τοῖς δυσί; ὁ δὲ τὴν χεῖρα προτείνας τοὺς δύο ὑπεδείκνυε δακτύλους.
>
> *They asked a certain untalented grammar teacher: "Is it better to say two or both?" He stretched out his hand and showed them two fingers.*

The grammatical qualm of the question has to do with the declension of numerals in Greek. People want to know if number "two" (*dyo*) should be declined to follow the case of the article or not. It would be impossible to reproduce this question exactly in English, a language in which words are not declined. Even so, the words "two" and "both" conveniently fit the joke because these two expressions are close enough to mimic the intimate relationship that exists between the nominative case of the numeral (*dyo*) and its dative case (*dysi*). Unfortunately, the question of the anecdote in English does not require a grammatically correct answer and depends on the context in which these words are used, whereas the correct answer in Greek would be *tois dysi* (and not *tois dyo*), since the numeral "two" does in fact follow the declension of the article. Yet, both the Greek anecdote and its English translation exempt the "grammar teacher" (*grammatikos*) from answering the question, since the display of the two fingers can be interpreted as ambiguous. At least, however, he did not show one finger only!

Anecdote 197 is about a literature class:

> Ἀφυὴς γραμματικὸς ἐρωτηθείς· Ἡ μήτηρ Πριάμου τίς ἐκαλεῖτο; ἀπορῶν ἔφη· Ἡμεῖς κατὰ τιμὴν κυρίαν αὐτὴν καλοῦμεν.
>
> *They asked an untalented grammar teacher a question: "How was Priam's mother called?" Seeing that he was in trouble, he replied, "It is more polite to call her madam."*

The verb "to be in trouble" (*aporeô*) appears often in Plato's dialogues when Socrates cross-examines one of his conservation partners until his incisive questions leave him wordless. We cannot help but feel sympathy, however, for the teacher who was in trouble, since this "madam" (*kyria*) whom Heracles killed and who was married to Priam, the king of Troy, is not only an obscure figure in epic literature, but she also receives several names. In his fragment 6.1, Scamon (MÜLLER, 1851), a Greek historian from the fourth century B.C., son of the historian Hellanicus, comments the passage of the **Iliad** (3.250) in which Priam is called "son of Laomedon" (*Laomedontiadês*), and states that Porphyry, in a lost work titled **On the names omitted by the poet**, calls him by that name; while Alcman calls her Leuxippe; Hellanicus calls her Estimo; and Estamis calls her Toasa. Hekabe, Priam's wife, also had an obscure genealogy (FOWLER, 2013, v. 2, p. 527). In fact, according to Suetonius (**Tiberius** 70.3), Emperor Tiberius used to select teachers depending on their answer to the question on who Hekabe's mother was. He would hire only those who gave the correct answer as Evagore (cf. Hesiod, **Theogony** 257). If the teacher of this joke did not know who Priam's mother was, he would probably not know who his mother-in-law was! He would not, therefore, be hired. The anecdote then points to the importance that Greek literature continued to have, even at a time when Christianity had already established itself as the official religion of the empire.

Jokes about an incompetent student

There are also in the **Philogelus** a few jokes about incompetent students. In **anecdote 199**, a student gets in trouble while his classmates get ready for physical exercises:

> Ἀφυὴς μαθητὴς κακῶς τινα κείρας καὶ παρωνυχίδας ποιήσας καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὑπὸ τοῦ ὀνυχιζομένου ἀπωσθεὶς ἀνεβόησεν· Ἐπιστάτα, τί οὐκ ἀφίης<ί> με μαθεῖν;
>
> *An incompetent student cuts a student's hair very badly and then causes a whitlow on another. For this reason, he is pushed away by the one whose nails he was trimming, and complains: "Coach, why won't he let me learn?"*

The fact that the student calls his teacher "coach" (*epistatês*) suggests a gym context. In spite of this, the word has the sense of "supervisor", too, and can therefore set the occasion in a classroom. The practicing student cuts his friend's nails to the finger pulp. The use of the expression *parônychidas poiêsas* suggests that the student reached the finger pulp or nail fold, thus hurting the person in whom he practiced. The humor of the joke lies in the fact that the incompetent student is surprised by the attitude of his victim, demanding from the coach an opportunity to learn.

It seems that the issue of learning how to trim someone else's nails was an important part of the curriculum, since **anecdote 200** refers to a similar situation:

> Ἀφυὴς μαθητὴς ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐπιστάτου κελευσθεὶς ὀνυχίσαι οἰκοδεσπότην ἐδάκρυσε. τοῦ δὲ τὴν αἰτίαν ἐρωτήσαντος ἔφη· Φοβοῦμαι καὶ κλαίω· μέλλω γὰρ τραυματίσαι σε, καὶ παρωνυχίδας ποιήσεις, καὶ τύψει με ὁ ἐπιστάτης.
>
> *An incompetent student started to cry when his coach told him to trim a certain man's nails. When the latter asked him why, he replied, "I am crying because I am afraid. I'm going to hurt you; I'm going to cause a whitlow, and the coach will hit me.*

Anecdotes about incompetent students and teachers show that the vocation for teaching and learning has always been relative, contingent to personal interests, disposition and natural abilities. Anecdote 200 also speaks of the reality of physical punishment in case of unsatisfactory performance.

Anedoctes about one's school life

Another group of jokes in the **Philogelus** refer to one's school life but are not limited to a specific theme. **Anecdote 61** reads as follows:

> Σχολαστικὸς χαμαιδιδάσκαλος ἄφνω ἀποβλέψας εἰς τὴν γωνίαν ἐβόησε· Διονύσιος ἐν τῇ γωνίᾳ ἀτακτεῖ. εἰπόντος δέ τινος, ὅτι οὔπω πάρεστιν, ὁ δὲ ἔφη· Ὅταν ἔλθῃ.
>
> *An idiotic primary teacher suddenly looks to the corner and shouts: Dionysus is reigning in the corner! When they say that he is not yet present, the teacher replies: - He will certainly reign when he arrives!*

In this anecdote, the educator is identified as a "primary teacher" (*chamaididaskalos*). The term literally means "the one who teaches on the ground," a likely reference to the fact that this teacher deals with young children who are still involved in playful activities rather than in a more challenging pursue of knowledge. The teacher is the object of the joke; therefore, his identification as "idiotic" (scholastikos). This master wants to punish a student named Dionysus, a perfect name for the joker's intentions, since it refers to the god of drunkenness and unruly life. The professor complains that Dionysus is "reigning" in a corner of the room. The verb *atakteô*, translated as "reigning", means "to start a rebellion", "to act subversively" or "to lead a disorderly life". The word seems too dramatic for the situation and reveals the pedantic nature of the teacher's speech. Although the teacher wished to scold the student, he comes up against the fact that the boy was not present yet. And that is why the joke is so funny.

Anecdote 61 reveals that, like today, teachers faced in late antiquity the bad behavior of some insubordinate and difficult students who refused to engage in the educational process. In **anecdote 136**, however, the context deals with stereotypes:

> Σιδόνιος γραμματικὸς ἠρώτα τὸν †διδάσκαλον· Ἡ πεντακότυλος λήκυθος πόσον χωρεῖ; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· Οἶνον λέγεις ἢ ἔλαιον;

> *A primary teacher from Sidon once asked his master, "How many liters in a one-liter bottle?" He responded: "Are we talking about wine or olive oil?"*

The **Philogelus** contains several anecdotes about the Sidonians, that is, the inhabitants of Sidon, one of the cities of Phoenicia. In fact, The **Suidas** informs us that the ancient Greeks used to refer to any Phoenician as a "Sidonian." Many Sidonians appear as objects of ridicule in our joke book, including an "orator" (*rhêtôr*) in anecdote 129, a "sophist" (*sophistês*) in anecdotes 130 and 131, a "businessman" (*pragmateutês*) in anecdote 133, a "centurion" (*hekatontarchos* or *kentouriôn*) in anecdotes 134 and 138, and a physician (*iatros*) in anecdote 139. In fact, there is in the book a whole section dedicated to the stupidity of these foreigners whose intelligence the Greeks underestimated. In the case of anecdote 136, our Sidonian is a "grammar teacher" (*grammatikos*). The Greek term, from which the word "grammar" originated in English, refers to teachers who taught students how to write and read (*grammata*). Therefore, we are talking about a "literacy teacher". He engages another teacher in the conversation who seems to have enjoyed a superior status. The latter does not come from Sidon and is identified by the pompous title of "master" (*didaskalos*). The bottle in question is the *lêkythos*, a vessel usually designed to contain perfumes and ointments. The measure used is the *kotylê*, equivalent to quarter of a liter. Five *kotylai* total 1.25 liters. The question asked by the Sidonian is foolish enough to stir up some good laughter; by means of a comic reversal, however, his very master shows himself to be equally foolish. In the end, the one who is the object of stereotyping is not much different from the pedantic Greek master with whom he talks. But we are otherwise allowed to imagine that they are both Sidonians and that their performance occurs in a school in Sidon, although this is not explicitly stated in the anecdote. The term *scholastikos* does not appear here in reference to either one of the two characters, suggesting that, potentially, both become the object of the joke. In any case, the joke reveals that, even in the cradle of education, there were forms of stratification much similar to the ones that, to this day, cause some educators to become subordinate to others.

Jokes about the pedagogue

In the anecdotes that I have mentioned thus far, there were no references to the pedagogue. I chose to leave the few jokes that deal with this enigmatic figure for this last section. In general, they are situations related to food or drink. In **anecdote 79**, wine is the subject:

> Σχολαστικῷ ὑπερζέουσαν κύλικα ὁ οἰνοχόος ὤρεξεν. ὁ δὲ ἐπὶ τῆς τραπέζης αὐτὴν θείς· Οὕτω μενέ<τω>, ἔφη, μέχρι ὁ παιδαγωγός σου ἐλθὼν εὕρῃ αὐτὴν ζέουσαν.
>
> *A butler fills a cup to the brim and holds it out to an idiotic boy. He then puts it on the table, and the butler tells him, "Let it stay there so your pedagogue comes and finds it full."*

Ancient custom required that a "pedagogue" (*paidagôgos*) chaperoned his pupils to their destination, leave them there and return later, in order to escort them back home. In ancient Greece, wine was diluted in water. To get drunk, a guest needed a large amount of drink. In our joke, however, a butler explicitly requires the boy not to drink much. He should not empty the cup filled to the brim (*hyperzeousan kylika*) until his chaperone would return. The joke helps us realize that, at the end of antiquity, by the fourth and fifth centuries, a pedagogue still retained his traditional role as an escort.

In the **Philogelus**, there are some anecdotes about hungry people. In anecdote 221, such hungry person is a "physician" (*iatros*); in 222, a "patient" (*arrôstos*); and in 226, an "actor" (*hypokritês*). Anecdotes 219 and 223-225 do not mention any such specifications. Generally, someone has just baked a loaf of bread, and set it to cool down at a place where it is safely stored away from the reach of wild animals but also where our hungry characters could see it. In anecdote 223, a starving man sees a loaf of bread cooling on a "doorway" (*hypertyros*). In anecdote 221, a hungry physician sees the loaf of bread cooling in a "hole" (*trypê*).

But **anecdote 220** is the one that should capture our interest here, since it makes fun of a hungry pedagogue. It is common, in the **Philogelus**, for the same joke to have two versions. This is exactly what happens with the anecdote of the hungry pedagogue. In the first version of this joke, the name of the pedagogue is replaced by a reference to the "physical education teacher" (*paidotribês*).

> {A:} Λιμόξηρος παιδοτρίβης ἰδὼν ἄρτον κρεμάμενον εἶπε· Καταβαίνεις; ἀπαγγέλλεις; ἢ ἀναβαίνω καὶ ἁπαρτίζω σε.
>
> {A:} *A hungry gym teacher saw a loaf of bread up high, and said, "Are you coming down? Is that a promise? Or should I go up to grab a hold of you?"*

Urged by his appetite, the gym teacher of joke 220 initiates a dialogue with the object of his desire. In that conversation, he tries to seduce the loaf of bread to come down in order to meet him. If this does not happen, there is a clear threat that the hungry man will go up in order to grab a hold of such snack. One way or another, someone else's bread will end up in a hungry man's stomach.

In the second version of **anecdote 220**, we have a pedagogue instead of a gym teacher:

> {β:} Λιμόξηρος παιδαγωγὸς ἰδὼν ἄρτον ἔν τινι ὕψει κρεμάμενον εἶπε· Καταβαίνεις καὶ ἀπαγγέλλεις; ἢ ἀναβαίνω <καὶ> ἁπαρτίζω σε.
>
> {B:} *A hungry pedagogue saw a loaf of bread up high, and said, "Are you coming down? Is that a promise? Or should I go up to grab a hold of you?"*

A gym teacher, a physician, an actor, a pedagogue and other ordinary people whose occupation is not revealed, all appear in jokes about starving people. That fact points to the servile condition of all these characters, including the physician (TORRES, 2008, pp. 179-181). In this group of anecdotes, starving people want to steal a loaf of bread that belongs to someone else, and they do that in order to slake hunger. Of course, they therefore cannot be aristocrats.

Conclusion

A close reading of a few anecdotes about the pedagogue and school life from the fourth or fifth century A.D. does not reveal that there had been any noteworthy change in the social condition or in the appreciation the pedagogue enjoyed in Greco-Roman society. He begins his career as a slave and until that moment in history continues to enjoy an unfavorable social standing. For this reason, we cannot assume that contemporary society chose him to represent the art and science of youth and child education because he enjoyed a better social status that the growth of Christianity had conferred on him. *Bien au contraire*, I would like to suggest that the pedagogue was chosen to represent education mainly because his social status was low or at least

in tandem with that which teachers themselves enjoyed in late antiquity. I am not referring here to the great masters and philosophers, under whose responsibility the education of aristocratic children fell, but to the teachers who dealt with the education of common children and young people on a daily basis. Paladas of Alexandria, for example, was a fourth-century A.D. poet who dedicated himself to that career. His poems are part of the so-called **Greek anthology**, a collection of more than six thousand poems written by about 300 different poets over a period of more than a thousand years (PATON, 1916-1918). Endowed with a remarkable sense of humor, the poet makes the following statement, in epigram 72 of book 10:

> Σκηνὴ πᾶς ὁ βίος καὶ παίγνιον· ἢ μάθε παίζειν
> τὴν σπουδὴν μεταθεὶς ἢ φέρε τὰς ὀδύνας.
>
> *Life is all stage and comedy;*
> *Whoever does not learn how to play, pays the bill.*

That was his philosophy of life, and he is true to it when in epigram 169 of book 9 he humorously refers to the financial difficulties that he faced as a grammar teacher, which is why he regards his occupation as equivalent to a pledge to poverty:

> Μῆνις Ἀχιλλῆος καὶ ἐμοὶ πρόφασις γεγένηται
> οὐλομένης πενίης γραμματικευσαμένῳ.
> εἴθε δὲ σὺν Δαναοῖς με κατέκτανε μῆνις ἐκείνη,
> πρὶν χαλεπὸς λιμὸς γραμματικῆς ὀλέσει.
> ἀλλ' ἵν' ἀφαρπάξῃ Βρισηίδα πρὶν Ἀγαμέμνων,
> τὴν Ἑλένην δ' ὁ Πάρις, πτωχὸς ἐγὼ γενόμην.
>
> *The wrath of Achilles was also a reason for*
> *My hapless poverty when teaching grammar.*
> *I wish that anger had killed me with the Greeks,*
> *Before the painful hunger for grammar fell upon me.*
> *However, in order for Agamemnon to make off with Briseis,*
> *And Paris, with Helen, I became a broke.*

Thus, in epigram 171 of book 9, he talks about his decision to abandon his teaching career in order to search for a more financially rewarding occupation:

> Ὄργανα Μουσάων, τὰ πολύστονα βιβλία πωλῶ
> εἰς ἑτέρας τέχνης ἔργα μετερχόμενος.
> Πιερίδες, σῴζοισθε· λόγοι, συντάσσομαι ὑμῖν·
> σύνταξις γὰρ ἐμοὶ καὶ θάνατον παρέχει.
>
> *I am selling my wretched books, these antiques,*
> *For I move on to the works of another office.*
> *Muses, farewell! Letters, I wave you goodbye!*
> *It's just that syntax only brings me death.*

The poet is selling his "wretched books" (*ta polystona biblia*), which he calls "antique", that is, "the tools of the Muses" (*organa mousaôn*). Of course, it took him a lot of effort to master the literary and grammatical aspects of *paideia*, ancient Greek education. Despite the commitment it required from him, the reward was not worth it. Then he takes

leave of the "Muses" (*Pierides*) and the "letters" (*logoi*), and sets out for "another office" (*heteras technês*). He concludes that syntax was not enough to give him the lifestyle he wanted.

It seems, therefore, that it was an almost servile condition enjoyed by teachers in the Greco-Roman era that made the pedagogue, a slave in charge of escorting children and young people to school and other places, as a model for teachers, thus lending his name to the art of education. Although this is a sad observation, it suggests that teaching has traditionally been undervalued, implying that our society is yet learn and recognize the importance of pedagogues and their formidable contribution to educational theory, despite their own social and economic discomfort.

Apart from the most pressing and immediate considerations woven here, the relationship between philosophy, irony and pedagogy points us to the fact that a "pedagogical dimension of irony" contributes to the development of an "ascending process" in which "the critical-emancipating dimension of irony asserts itself as hegemonic in the dialogical relationship among educational agents" (ZUIN, 2008, p.14). There are philosophical and ironic dimensions intrinsic to the word "pedagogue", since Socrates gave "irony" a positive sense of a "stimulus to the elaboration of new meanings" (ZUIN, 2008, p.17). Therefore, the servile origin of pedagogues and their millennial trajectory can inspire them beyond presenting students with a quality-filled education above questioning. In fact, there are no pedestals on which pedagogues can step up. After all, their historical origin and the history of education both demand from them a necessarily philosophical and ironic poise.

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